



Story and Photos by Bob Rosenburgh

Go Green

OF the college students who are part of the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps, the top performers are frequently Green-to-Gold cadets — students enrolled through a program that gives exceptional enlisted soldiers an opportunity to earn a college degree and a commission as a second lieutenant.

About 10 percent of those in the Army ROTC Advanced Course are Green-to-Gold cadets, a percentage that grows every year.

CPT Gary Pearson, Green-to-Gold coordinator for the 4th ROTC Region at Fort Lewis, Wash., said the program is expanding as awareness of it grows. Green-to-Gold, he explained, is an important part of the Army's plan for retaining its best enlisted soldiers, offering them the opportunity to become either active- or reserve-component officers.

"Green-to-Gold is a separation from service," he explained, "replacing the actual contract you are currently under in order to attend college for an education that includes the ROTC program."

Green-to-Gold offers scholarship and non-scholarship programs. The scholarship is a two-, three- or four-

year plan, while the non-scholarship program is for two years.

"The programs differ in duration and scholarship options," Pearson said. "The scholarship program provides tuition, fees, assistance, books, supplies and a monthly stipend," he said, "but it does not cover room and board." Some schools, however, offer free room and board as institutional incentives to attract scholarship students.

"You should learn what each specific schools can do for you and also remember that you may be allowed to draw on your GI Bill benefits," he said.

Non-scholarship cadets draw a monthly \$200 stipend and can use their earned military educational benefits, and may participate in simultaneous membership programs in the National Guard or Army Reserve. Some states provide additional money or tuition benefits to Guard members in college.

Pearson explained that turning a qualified enlisted soldier into an officer through ROTC adds value to the Army's ranks. Green-to-Gold doesn't take soldiers from the Army, it just gives them additional opportunities.

Participants have many reasons for going Green-to-Gold.

"I love leadership

and responsibility," said PFC Basilio Laboy of the 1st Battalion, 68th Engineer Regiment, at Fort Lewis. "I love high-speed and the military, so I want to go Green-to-Gold." Currently a light-vehicle mechanic, he hopes to become an aviation officer.

People who have prior service and understand the military add a dimension to their programs that improves everyone's performance.

A good example is Cadet Dennis Marshall from Ohio's University of Akron. He was a staff sergeant when he elected to go Green-to-Gold.

As an active-duty soldier he served in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War and served a tour in Germany and two stateside tours before applying for a Green-to-Gold scholarship.

"I always wanted to be an Army officer," Marshall explained. "I just waited until I felt I had enough knowledge to become an officer."

Part of his plan included earning college credits through the Army's continuing education system, so he applied for Green-to-Gold after completing two years of college.

Marshall represents the kind of high-quality person selected for the limited number of scholarships available each year — about 250 nationally.

Although



Spec. Shane Paul Greaser of Company B, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regt., reviews his scholarship application with Capt. Gary Pearson, Green To Gold Coordinator for the 4th Region (ROTC) at Fort Lewis, Wash.

Bob Rosenburgh is 4th ROTC Region's deputy public affairs officer.

Green-to-Gold is publicized through pamphlets and posters to make soldiers aware of the program, the best approach comes in providing information about it to commanders, said MAJ Dan King, recruiting branch chief at the U.S. Army Cadet Command headquarters.

The standard route into the program is for soldiers to apply after at least two years of service, ensuring their own maturity and allowing their commanders to evaluate their performance and future potential. A soldier who does well as an NCO might also display certain traits and characteristics of leadership that can enhance both the Army and the individual's performance as an officer.

Following the commander's recommendation, it then becomes the

soldier's responsibility to process into the program.

Pearson also explained the "hip-pocket" program, whereby a division, installation or corps commander can make awards to soldiers who achieve excellence.

"This is a two-year scholarship, and each commander has five of these to give out every year. That's five 'hip-pocket' scholarships in addition to any standard ROTC scholarships."

Pearson said soldiers can learn about Green-to-Gold through monthly briefings at their installation education centers, and through brochures and other materials, then talk to officers to learn more.

Interested soldiers then find schools with ROTC programs, apply for academic acceptance and continue the Green-to-Gold application process.

One soldier who benefited from the non-scholarship program was 2LT Jason Ruffin, who served two and one-half years as a military policeman at Fort Riley, Kan., before he decided to become an officer. Some of his friends were looking into Officer Candidate School when they learned of Green-to-Gold, so Ruffin decided to find out for himself what was available.

"I had two and a half years of

previous college," he said, "so I entered the program as an ROTC cadet in my junior year." He graduated from the University of Kansas and was commissioned last year.

Ruffin said his military service ensured that he entered the program physically fit and gave him a better idea about what is expected of cadets and soldiers alike. He said it made him a better officer as well.

"I'm better able to relate to the troops — the junior enlisted ranks as well as NCOs — because I have insights into their jobs, having been there," he explained.

Ruffin said the program was flexible enough to allow him to enter on his own financial terms, too.

"I chose not to take a scholarship, because I would have to wait for the

next semester to get in," he said. "The

scholarship applications had already been turned in, so I just took a straight 'Chapter 16,' where they let me out of the Army, and now I owe them three more years as an officer."

Ruffin paid his tuition on the Montgomery GI Bill, earned during his enlisted service and authorized for use in the Green-to-Gold program.

"I got \$450 a month, which is plenty for a state college." With tuition at \$1,000 a semester, he said the Montgomery Bill is ample. "And I worked part time at a department store in between classes and homework."

For soldiers entering Green-to-Gold under a scholarship contract, the Army pays the entire cost of tuition. Pearson stressed, however, that student cadets receive no paychecks, since they are no longer members of the armed forces. Military pay and benefits return after commissioning.

A two-year non-scholarship Green-to-Gold cadet, however, may have membership in the Army National Guard or Army Reserve in the Simultaneous Membership Program as an assistant platoon leader with pay equivalent to E-5.

Cadet Terrence Adams, from Western Michigan University, said he wanted to complete his education, but added that he loves the Army and can't wait to get back in. He hopes to become an aviation officer.

Colombia-born SPC Carolina Hernandez is earning her American citizenship and hopes to qualify for an ROTC Green-to-Gold scholarship. "I think the experience I have gained as an enlisted soldier can be put to good use and give me some special insights if I become an officer," she said. She has already completed some college classes on her own time through the Fort Lewis education center.

"While it is possible to enlist in the Army without U.S. citizenship," King explained, "ROTC regulations require U.S. citizenship to qualify for scholarships and to enroll in the advanced course."

Soldiers who want to learn more about Green-to-Gold can request information and applications by writing to U.S. Army Cadet Command, ATTN: ROTC Scholarships (AD), Fort Monroe, VA 23651-5238, by calling toll-free (800) USA-ROTC ext. 484, or by visiting www.armyrotc.com on the web.

They can also visit installation education centers or a professor of military science at a nearby college or university with an ROTC program. □

Green-to-Gold